

Pagosa Ranger District Announces Early Summer Programs

"Between every two pines is a doorway to a new world." – John Muir

Again this year, the Pagosa Ranger District of the San Juan National Forest is sponsoring a series of free walks and talks open to anyone with an interest in learning more about the complex and fascinating area surrounding Pagosa Springs. From blooms to butterflies, and beetles to bedrock, join Forest Service staff and volunteers as they lead short or moderate hikes on the national forest. Late summer activities will be released in July.

The kick-off event will be a wildflower walk along the Piedra River Trail, lead by Dick Moseley. Many will remember Dick's expertise and enthusiasm during several hikes each year as he followed the peak blooming period up in elevation. Welcome him back to Pagosa country on Tuesday, June 18, at 9:30 am at the Piedra River Trailhead. In addition to species identification, this is a fine opportunity to learn about plant morphology and reproduction.

On Wednesday, June 26, at 9:00 am, also at the Piedra River Trailhead, the geology tour of Ice Caves Ridge will begin. Rick Stinchfield will discuss the formation of the ice caves and the sedimentary rocks of the Colorado Plateau. An overview of the geology of the Pagosa Ranger District, with an eye on why we have the topography that exists today, will be included. The guided portion of the hike will end at the crest of the ridge where there are fine views.

Anyone who has traveled over Wolf Creek Pass in the past couple of years has no doubt seen the widespread loss of Engelmann spruce. Pagosa Ranger District forester Steve Hartsvigen will lead an interpretive program to view and talk about the effects of, and reasons behind, the die-off. The meeting place for this hike will be at the large parking area at the junction of US route 160 and Forest Road 039 (the Falls Creek Road) about 17 miles northeast of Pagosa Springs. The tour will begin at 9 am on Thursday, July 11.

The following day, Friday, July 12, Susan Dussell will lead a slow-paced hike from Wolf Creek Pass to the Rock Garden and perhaps on toward Alberta Peak to identify wildflowers. Gather at the parking area with the interpretive signs atop the pass at 9 am and be prepared to hike at least three miles with 800 feet of elevation gain, all at high altitude. Pre-registration for this walk is required (call the Pagosa Ranger District at 264-2268) and the group size is limited to 15.

The interactions between butterfly and flower species will be the topic of the walk on Tuesday, July 16. MK Thompson, education assistant with the San Juan Mountains Association, will discuss this and other topics (did you know butterflies can taste with their feet?) on the hike, which will begin at the Four Mile Trailhead at 9:30 am. If the butterflies fail to cooperate, at least the flower show should be good.

All programs are outside and participants should be prepared for rapid changes in weather. Sunscreen, sufficient water, and appropriate footwear make the hikes safer and more enjoyable. Please leave canine companions at home. Hikes usually last for 2 to 3 hours. For further information on any of these programs, contact the Pagosa Ranger District by calling 264-2268.